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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides an overview of the current issues surrounding paraeducator employment and synthesizes recommendations of various national, state, and local paraeducator task force groups. Based on these recommendations, the booklet outlines suggestions for paraeducators, teachers, and principals to increase paraeducator effectiveness. After an introduction, the booklet focuses on: "In Context: What are the Current Issues Involving Paraeducators?" (concerns about preparation training, and roles and about recent legislation); "How are Researchers, Practitioners, and Policymakers Responding to These Concerns and Policies?"; "What are the Guidelines for Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities?" (roles for teachers, principals, and paraeducators); "Northwest Sampler" (Houghtaling Elementary School, Ketchikan, Alaska; Oakwood Elementary School, Preston, Idaho; Hardin Public Schools, Hardin, Montana; and Cherrydale School, Steilacoom, Washington); and "Conclusion" (paraeducators can offer tremendous benefits for children, providing instructional reinforcement that enhances every student's opportunity to learn, meet standards, and achieve academic success). An appendix presents existing or proposed state paraeducator certification policies. Relevant resources are listed. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESSFUL PARAEDUCATOR SERVICES

A Guide for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals

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BY REQUEST...

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESSFUL PARAEDUCATOR SERVICES

A Guide for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals

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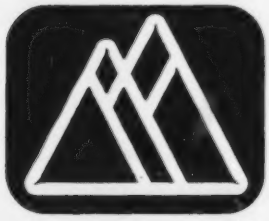

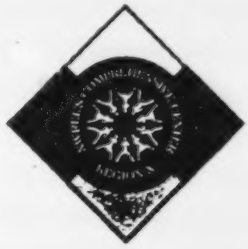

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FOREWORD

This booklet is the 19th in a series of "hot topic" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet in the series contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, a sampling of how Northwest schools are addressing the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, selected references, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet will give practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success in certain areas. The series goal is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

This issue of By Request is a collaborative project between the Comprehensive Center and the Office of Planning and Program Development.

INTRODUCTION

In schools across the country, paraeducators have long been considered valuable members of the instructional team. Working alongside and under the direction of teachers and other certified professionals, these staff members assist and support teachers in many different ways. They provide small group instruction or tutor individual children under teacher direction. They organize parent involvement activities and make visits to students' homes. Others work in school media centers, work with special education students, or are translators for English language learners. Whatever their role, paraeducators are no longer just making photocopies or designing bulletin boards, but are contributing meaningfully to learner-centered activities.

As more paraeducators are being hired to provide these essential services, policymakers are strengthening requirements and standards for their employment. National, state, and local paraeducator task forces are developing guidelines to aid districts and schools in implementing these requirements. These groups generally agree on the factors that can increase the overall effectiveness of paraeducators (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Pickett, 1999; Shellard, 2002).

The purpose of this booklet is to provide an overview of the current issues surrounding paraeducator employment and to synthesize the recommendations of the task force groups. Based on these recommendations, the booklet outlines suggestions for paraeducators, teachers, and principals to increase paraeducator effectiveness. The Northwest Sampler section illustrates how, in different ways, these strategies are put in place at three schools and one district in the Northwest. A list of resources is provided for further reference.

IN CONTEXT: WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES INVOLVING PARAEDUCATORS?

In the last decade, the number of paraeducators has increased dramatically both in numbers and as a proportion of all instructional staff. In 1990, the total number of full-time paraeducators in the United States was 395,642. In 1999, the number rose to 621,385, an increase of 57 percent. In the Northwest states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, this trend has been even more dramatic—a 67 percent increase in paraeducators, with only a 15 percent increase in teachers (Ghedam, 2001; Snyder & Hoffman, 1993, 2001).

Several more statistics point to the increased importance of paraeducators in the public school system:

- Approximately 75 percent of all paraeducators work in elementary schools.
- Almost half of this paraprofessional workforce is hired for special education programs.
- An estimated 15 to 18 percent work in bilingual programs.
- Paraeducators are employed in Title I programs in more than 70 percent of elementary schools and nearly 50 percent of middle schools throughout the country (Leighton et al., 1997).

Concerns About Preparation, Training, and Roles

While the employment of paraeducators in schools has increased dramatically, clearly defined state and district policies have lagged behind. Concerns regarding the preparation, training, and instructional roles of paraeducators have become more urgent (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001/2002; Gerber et al., 2001; Shellard, 2002). While a number of states and districts throughout the country are currently developing policies (see Appendix for list of state policies), it is still rare to find well-defined standards for paraeducator roles, supervision, and preparation (Pickett, 1999). Nor do many states have guidelines for preparing teachers and other staff in their role of directing paraeducators.

Some of the primary concerns cited in reports, staff interviews, and case studies (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000/2001; Gerber et al., 2001; Shellard, 2002) include:

- Lack of formal or even informal training for paraeducators
- Lack of requirements for employment, training, and supervision
- Unclear job responsibilities, which can include paraeducators being assigned duties beyond their job description (and thus not adequately paid)
- Lack of recognition within the school system
- Lack of respect for paraeducator knowledge and experience, especially if the paraeducator is from the same cultural background or community as the students (Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Rueda & Monzo, 2000)
- Lack of role models for paraeducators to follow and lack of feedback on their performance
- Lack of planning time, interaction, and communication between teachers and paraeducators

Recent Legislation

These concerns combined with the increased national focus on Title I and special education programs, have resulted in recent legislative attempts to establish clear standards and requirements for paraeducators.

One piece of legislation that affects nearly half of all paraeducators is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97). Final regulations to implement the Act were released in March 1999. Subpart B Section 300.136 addresses the use of paraeducators within special education:

"A state may allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulations, or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part, to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities under Part B of the Act (IDEA 97)."

While this statute insists on appropriate training and supervision, it also emphasizes the priority of state law and policy—giving states the option of determining whether to use paraeducators and to what extent, and leaving the definition of "appropriate training and supervision" for each state to decide (from IDEA 97, *Analysis of Comments, Discussions and Changes from Attachment discussion of Section 300.136(f)).* Since IDEA is up for reauthorization in 2002-2003, these requirements may be adjusted.

The recent No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, reauthorizing the ESEA (including Title I) for six years, has gone even further in addressing the employment of paraeducators. Section 1119 (pp. 128-133) requires that Local Education Agencies

(LEAs) receiving Title I assistance ensure that all paraeducators hired after the enactment of the act have:

- Completed at least two years of study at an institute of higher education OR
- Obtained an associate's (or higher) degree OR
- Met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing in reading, writing, and mathematics (or reading, writing, and mathematics readiness as appropriate)

Paraeducators hired before the date of enactment (January 8, 2002) are expected to satisfy these requirements within four years. Exceptions are made for paraeducators who are primarily acting as translators, or whose duties consist solely of conducting parent involvement activities. To satisfy these requirements, the legislation stipulates that funds from Part B of Title I be used for training and professional development.

In addition to these requirements, LEAs are also being asked to ensure that paraeducators are not "assigned a duty inconsistent" with the following responsibilities:

- To provide one-to-one tutoring, if tutoring is scheduled at a time when the student would not receive instruction from a teacher
- To assist with classroom management such as organizing instructional materials
- To conduct parent involvement activities
- To provide assistance in a computer laboratory
- To provide support in a library or media center

- To act as a translator
- To provide instructional services under the direct supervision of a teacher

To encourage compliance, LEAs are expected to require the principal of each school to annually verify, in writing, that the school is meeting these requirements.

HOW ARE RESEARCHERS, PRACTITIONERS, AND POLICYMAKERS RESPONDING TO THESE CONCERNS AND POLICIES?

As a result of these new policies and concerns regarding standards for paraeducator employment, professional organizations, unions, institutes of higher education, and policymakers have formed national and regional task forces.

- The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services (NRCP), funded by the Office of Special Education Programs is developing guidelines and standards for paraeducator roles, supervision, skill and knowledge competencies, and preparation. NRCP convened a task force that represented state education agencies, local education agencies, colleges and universities, parents, paraeducators, professional organizations, and unions. The task force assisted with the development of proposed guidelines for responsibilities and standards for teachers/providers and paraeducators. To validate these findings, the task force conducted a nationwide mail survey sent to a selected sample of 700 individuals with experience and understanding of paraeducator employment, utilization, preparation, and retention. Responses from 400 of these administrators, faculty members, teachers, and paraeducators helped finalize the scope of responsibilities and three levels of paraeducator positions.

  The Center provides technical assistance on policy questions, management practices, regulatory procedures, and training models that will enable administrators and staff

developers to improve the recruitment, deployment, supervision, and career development of paraprofessionals.

- In 1999, the Associations of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education Partnerships (ASPIIRE) formed a Paraprofessional Workgroup to address the 1997 IDEA amendments. Key members of this group included representatives from the American Physical Therapy Association, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals, American Federation of Teachers, and the Council for Exceptional Children (to name a few). The group developed a consensus on the definition and training of paraprofessionals, identified a need for further resources, and made initial attempts to address the policies, standards, and systems that would ensure a skilled and appropriately supervised workforce (IDEA Partnerships, 2001).

- The National Center for Research on Diversity, Education, and Excellence (CREDE) has implemented a project called the Latino Paraprofessionals as Teachers: Building on the Funds of Knowledge to Improve Instruction. The project is investigating the "funds of knowledge" (i.e., knowledge of the language, social and discourse norms, and other cultural and linguistic resources of students and their communities) of bilingual Latino paraeducators in classroom settings (CREDE, n.d.). The goal is to determine what impact these factors have on classroom instruction for low-income English language learners in reading and language arts instruction. Publications explaining the results of the project offer recommendations to policymakers on how to design effective professional development programs to

make these paraeducators more effective in their role. The project also suggests ways paraeducators can act as a cultural bridge from school to family because of their funds of knowledge (Monzo & Rueda, 2000; Rueda & DeNeve, 1999).

These groups—as well as state task forces (such as in Washington, Montana, and Iowa)—are currently working on providing guidelines to states, districts, and schools to implement the new Title I regulations. They seek to answer many questions schools and districts have about the requirements, such as what kinds of assessments should be developed, who will pay for the development, and who will provide funding for professional development. For more information about these issues, contact the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (see the Resources section).

WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES FOR PARAEDUCATOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

Paraeducators can be a viable way to enrich services to students if basic guidelines about the utilization of paraeducators are followed (Pickett, 1999; Project PARA, n.d.):

- Paraeducators work under the direction of teachers (including classroom teachers, specialist teachers, and curriculum directors)
- Teachers are the managers of instruction and services
- Paraeducator effectiveness is maximized by consistent, quality, competency-based preservice, inservice, and on-the-job training
- Teacher supervisory effectiveness is maximized by adequate training focusing on decisionmaking, delegating, planning, and evaluating
- Administrators recognize the need for regularly scheduled time for teachers and paraeducators to plan together
- Teachers are involved in developing paraeducator policies, utilization, selection, training, supervision, and evaluation
- Paraeducators are recognized as valued team members and are integrated effectively into instructional teams

These guidelines, developed by paraeducator task forces, are designed to ensure that paraeducators are effectively supervised, adequately trained, and appropriately integrated into the planning and implementing teams (Pickett, 1999).

The level and style of supervision will vary depending on the level of experience and expertise of the paraeducators. For example, a paraeducator with 15 years experience may have less direction from a teacher or curriculum director

than would a first-year paraeducator. The NRCP has developed scopes of responsibility and skill standards for paraeducators. They are divided into three levels of positions. For example, Level 2 paraeducators have more instructional responsibilities than do Level 1 paraeducators. (See Pickett, 1999, for a more detailed explanation of levels.) Depending on the role of the paraeducator, a classroom teacher, a specialist teacher, a curriculum director, or all three could have supervisory roles, and each can provide a certain amount of direction (see profile of Cherrydale Elementary in the NW Sampler section, as an example).

Defining the roles of paraeducators will depend on the needs of the school, and the hiring guidelines of the state and/or district. What works in one setting may not work in another. Just as paraeducator roles and responsibilities will vary from site to site, so will the strategies to create success. (See Pickett, 1999, for more information about developing guidelines.)

Roles for School Staff

The following sections suggest ways that paraeducators, teachers, and principals can put the guidelines for effective paraeducator employment in place at their schools. Doing so requires the support of each member of the instructional team, and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The following guidelines and suggestions are based on the work of several professionals in the field of paraeducator development.[1] What we list here can get you started. Please consult the Resources and References sections for more suggestions.

What Can Paraeducators Do?

Paraeducators are a valuable asset for teachers in providing support and assistance in instruction and other direct services to students, and in helping to ensure a positive, safe, and supportive learning community. What can paraeducators do to be successful in their role? How can they work most effectively with other instructional team members to create a positive learning environment for students and a positive work environment for themselves and others? Here are a few guidelines for achieving these goals:

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[1] We have synthesized information from several sources for the next three sections. Rather than listing citations in the text for every component, we identify in this footnote the primary resources, and cite in text when using a direct quote or pointing to a specific reference. Primary resources are Ashbaker and Morgan, 1999 and 2000/01; French, 1997; Gerlach, 2001; Heller, 1997; Leighton et al., 1997; Pickett, 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Pickett, Steckelberg & Vasa, 1993; Shellard, 2002; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1997.

1. Understand your role to assist and support the teacher in delivering instruction or other services. Your role will, of course, depend on the job description, the teacher's expectations, and your skills and experience. Roles will be more flexible in some situations than in others. It helps to clarify your role right away with your supervising teacher and/or principal. One way to do this might be to sit down with your supervising teacher and discuss each activity you might be responsible for and what level of supervision and guidance you will receive. Clarify what responsibilities will be shared and what the teacher is responsible for. Ask questions regarding your role in various situations. If you are assisting students with special needs ask questions about your role in attending Individualized Education Plan meetings, and in implementing Behavioral Intervention Plans. Ask about your role in curriculum instruction. How much responsibility will you have to assume for assisting in planning? What guidance will you receive from the teacher in carrying out his or her lesson plans and instructions? What role will you have in assessing student performance? What guidelines and training for this will the teacher provide (Gerlach, 2001)?

2. Orient yourself to the school. Ideally, your school/district will have a formal orientation to introduce new paraeducators to the staff, review school policies and procedures, and provide other necessary pieces of information. However, you can take the initiative and ask questions of your principal or supervising teacher to make your first days and weeks less uncertain. Some questions might include (adapted from Gerlach, 2001; Montana Center on Disabilities [MCD], 2001b, p. 17):

- Who will be my supervisor(s)? When will we meet?
- Is there a weekly schedule and, if so, who gives it to me? Has planning time with the teacher been set into the schedule?
- Will there be a formal evaluation of my work? If so, who will be performing the evaluation?
- What are the specific policies on school safety, harassment, bullying, discipline, etc.? What is expected of me in terms of enforcing these policies?
- Am I invited and expected to attend staff meetings? When do they occur?
- Am I to attend parent conferences?
- How will I receive district and school communications? Has an e-mail account and mail box been set up for me?
- With whom am I to discuss work-related problems?
- What student records are available to me?
- What supplies and equipment are available to me and how do I obtain them?

3. Establish a relationship with the professional staff. The keys to a successful relationship with teachers and other staff members are effective communication, trust, respect, recognition, and collaborative problem solving. This obviously takes time as you get to know the staff. Here are some suggestions (adapted from AFT, n.d.):

- *Create an open relationship with professional staff members.* Set aside some time to get to know each other, and find out about each other's interests, professional goals, teaching styles, supervisory styles, discipline strategies, and classroom structure and organization methods. Let the teacher know what strengths and experience you bring to the position.

- *Practice active listening.* Active listening is a key to true communication. Elements of active listening include asking encouraging questions; clarifying to obtain clear information by asking who, what, when, and where questions; restating the facts to make sure you've understood; reflecting on the other person's feelings; summarizing the issue; and validating the other person's "dignity, efforts, and opinions" (AFT, n.d., p. 4).

- *Attempt to understand why conflicts occur and work to collaborate on conflict resolution strategies.*

- *Provide input on planning.* While the teacher is responsible for planning, the paraeducator should feel comfortable offering input and suggestions.

- *Offer feedback to the teacher.* Just as the teacher will and should provide paraeducators with feedback on their job performance, so should paraeducators provide feedback to the teacher on how the working relationship is developing. Discuss these questions periodically: Are we meeting often enough? Are we sharing information about student performance? Do we need to work on redefining roles and setting goals? Are we treating each other with respect and valuing each other's roles? Do we feel able to talk freely with each other about problems and issues (AFT, n.d., p. 11)?

For more suggestions on how to work effectively with teachers and create a successful team, see the *Creating a Classroom Team: How Teachers and Paraeducators Can Make Working Together Work* (AFT, n.d.) and *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals* (Gerlach, 2001).

4. Obtain training and professional development. National and state legislators and educators are working to respond to the need for paraeducator training, as required by the new Title I and Special Education legislation. Opportunities for training and professional development are becoming more and more available to paraeducators. Paraeducators can find out what their district and schools do to provide professional development opportunities for them. In a number of states, state paraeducator associations also provide training and resources. To list a few:

- The Web site www.paraeducator.com provides an online training module for training in the 14 Washington State Core Competencies for Paraeducators, as well as many other resources. Washington also has an annual paraeducator conference in June.

- Bates Technical College in Washington is just one college offering training for paraeducators. It is a statewide distance learning training program in the core competencies. For more information, see the program Web site at www.bates.ctc.edu/paraeducator/para00.htm

- Montana Paraeducator Development Project (www.msubillings.edu/mtcd/paraed/) provides training resources to paraeducators in the state. A paraeducator resource guide available on the Web site provides a wealth of information on team building, communication strategies, instructional guidelines, and descriptions of roles and responsibilities.

- The PAR²A Center at the University of Colorado provides training resources for paraeducators nationally.

More resources for paraeducator professional development are listed in the Resources section.

5. Be aware of confidentiality issues (Heller, 1997). Paraeducators, as members of the instructional team, are responsible for maintaining a relationship with school staff, parents, students, and others that is based on "an expectation of trust that each person will perform his/her duties to the best of his/her ability following professional and ethical standards" (MCD, 2001b, p. 21). As representatives of the school, paraeducators maintain professional integrity as they interact with members of the community, both in and outside school.

The issue of confidentiality is an important ethical consideration for all staff members. Because paraeducators have daily contact with students and access to confidential information, and may often interact with families and community members, they need to be aware of certain confidentiality ethics. No staff members, including paraeducators, should informally discuss school problems between and among staff members, discuss personalities of staff members outside the school, discuss administrative and interschool problems in the presence of students, or discuss student concerns with anyone not authorized to be a part of those discussions. Unless authorized to do so by the supervising teacher, paraeducators should not communicate with parents about a student's progress. If a student or parent brings up a concern, refer them to the supervising teacher. These considerations may sound like simple common sense, but it is a good idea to keep them in mind.

6. Conduct self-evaluations of instructional sessions. Along with any informal and formal evaluations of your

work, it is a good idea to develop a self-evaluation checklist with your supervising teacher that can help you evaluate an instructional session. The checklist provides many advantages. It can be a way for paraeducators to establish their own goals for improvement, a way to help the teacher determine what is needed for further professional development and support, and a way for the teacher to determine what he or she can do to make lessons clearer. Some questions to consider include (Gerlach, 2001; Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993):

- Did I review the lesson plan prior to the lesson?
- Were the objectives and directions clear?
- Did I have necessary materials prepared for the lesson?
- Did I feel adequately prepared for the instruction?
- Did I use appropriate reinforcement techniques?
- Was the teaching area arranged comfortably and appropriately for effective instruction for the students and myself?
- Did I record behavioral observations about the students?
- Did I record assessment data or summarize the students' performance?
- Were the students engaged and motivated throughout the lesson?
- Did I discuss the results with my supervising teacher?

What Can Teachers Do?

General education and specialist teachers are responsible for directing a paraeducator's work; however, many may not be well prepared for this role, especially if they are working with a paraeducator for the first time. "When school professionals provide good direction, they make the objectives and purposes of the task or lesson clear and they let the paraeducator know how much authority they have to make decisions associated with the task" (French, p. 111). Following are some sug-

gestions for understanding your responsibilities in working with paraeducators to create an effective instructional team:

1. Direct and supervise paraeducators. Often problems that come up regarding roles for para-educators and teachers are based on delegation of duties. Some school staff will delegate more authority and autonomy than others. The important issue is whether what has been delegated is appropriate for the teacher to delegate and the paraeducator to accept (Heller, 1997).

As mentioned previously, different situations will have different types of supervisory levels. Teachers also have individual supervisory styles—some provide more structured guidelines, others may be less directive. Here are a few important things for all teachers who are directing the work of paraprofessionals to think about :

- Make sure your expectations and directions are understood and that paraeducators have the knowledge and skills to fulfill your expectations. Ask the paraeducator what his or her expectations are from the teacher.

- Keep in mind that appropriate delegation of tasks can increase your productivity. It can also provide paraeducators with the opportunity to develop new skills and initiative (French, 1997). "Effective delegation is a process of steps: analyzing the task, deciding what to delegate, planning, selecting the right person, directing, and monitoring" (French, p. 114).

- "Provide clear, daily direction for coordinating plans, schedules, tasks and feedback" (Gerlach, 2001, p. 33).

- Provide clear explanations and guidelines for paraeducators' role in instruction (drill-and-practice, assessments, adapting lesson plans according to teacher directions, and monitoring student performance).

- Make sure paraeducators have the resources available to be most effective (including training).

For more specific guidelines on supervision see *Management of Paraeducators* (French, 1997).

2. Facilitate a positive working relationship. The best teacher paraeducator teams are built on trust, recognition, respect, communication, and collaborative problem solving. This may not be easy to achieve. Many issues come up that might make effective teamwork challenging. For example, if a paraeducator works primarily with students but is not assigned a direct supervisory teacher, how can a teacher work with the paraeducator to plan and coordinate services? Paraeducators and teachers may also have very different styles relating to students—a paraeducator may develop a different relationship with students than a teacher which might blur the lines of authority with them (Heller, 1997). It is easy to talk about being an effective team, but how does this look in practice? How can teachers foster these aspects?

- Understand that you and a paraeducator may have different working styles, different cultural backgrounds, and different educational strategies that can affect your working relationship. Take time to discuss these differences when you first start working together.

- Use the terms "we" and "us" instead of "I" and "you" to reaffirm that you each have a responsibility in the learning process and are both accountable (Shellard, 2002).

- Allow for "individual initiative." Don't expect a paraeducator to have exactly the same approach to a task that you do.

- Provide a schedule with a set meeting time at least weekly. Discuss how you will communicate if you don't have time to meet. Discuss this with your principal if there is a problem finding a set time to meet.

- Take time to listen to the paraeducator's concerns and questions.

3. Develop instructional plans for paraeducators. The teacher is responsible for developing plans for the paraeducator. It may be a special education teacher, a general education teacher, the curriculum director, or all three. Certainly there is room for flexibility, especially if a paraeducator has a high level of experience and skills. For example, "Level 3 paraeducators ... have some discretionary authority to modify learning activities that are developed by teachers/providers" (Pickett, 1999, p. 23). A teacher does not have to be constantly looking over the shoulder of a paraeducator, but should certainly be directing their work.

While plans do not have to follow a certain format, planning forms may help to clarify what the teacher expects the paraeducator to do in an instructional situation (see French, 1997, for examples). A plan generally includes objectives, activities, and evaluation. As the teacher and paraeducator become more familiar with expectations, plans can be

adapted and less formalized. A discussion of the teachers' learning goals and teaching philosophy during the planning process will help paraeducators understand the basis for plans and put them into context.

4. Provide feedback and effective evaluation. Evaluation should be an ongoing, continuous process designed not only to provide feedback for the paraeducator, but to evaluate the team relationship. A formal evaluation process should be developed by the school administrator or district with teacher input. Discuss the evaluation criteria that will be used to assess the paraeducators' performance. Let them know how often and when they will be evaluated. Provide an opportunity for paraeducators to offer feedback on your working relationship. When giving feedback, start with telling them what they do well, and then follow with constructive suggestions for improvement.

5. Recognize and respect the knowledge and expertise paraeducators bring to their role. Teachers should determine what unique skills, special interests, and training paraeducators have that can complement their own. A paraeducator may be from the same community and/or cultural background as the students, and thus may have an understanding of the students' language and culture. This knowledge and experience can be greatly beneficial for developing personal relationships with students and developing insights into their learning styles, enhancing instruction and learning goals. Encourage paraeducators to share this knowledge and understanding with you (MCD, 2001a). Encourage paraeducators to seek professional development to further their skills.

6. Discuss with paraeducators their role with students and families. Paraeducators need to know what their role is with students. How much authority do they have in correcting student behavior, assisting students with interpersonal issues, or overseeing student activities, for example? Discuss the importance of confidentiality regarding both students and parents.

Some districts hire paraeducators as "family advocates" (see Hardin profile, Northwest Sampler section) to provide outreach services to families and to encourage family involvement in their children's learning. These paraeducators may also have a unique relationship with the family if they are from the same community or cultural background. To capitalize on this role, here are some suggestions:

- Encourage paraeducators to attend parent-teacher conferences and meetings. If possible, hold these meetings when paraeducators can attend them.

- Talk with paraeducators about their background in the community and how their knowledge can be useful in helping you design instructional services.

- Discuss the issues of confidentiality with student and parent information and other school policy issues and how those would relate to their role with students and families.

What Can Principals Do?

The principal is ultimately responsible for developing policies and standards for paraeducator employment. Principals are also responsible for promoting and modeling a professional

climate within which roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated, understood, and respected. Administrators "take the leadership role in creating a school climate in which paraeducators have a professional identity and contribute to activities that help to enhance student achievement" (Gerlach, 2001, p. 43).

How can principals take the lead in ensuring the success of teacher/paraeducator teams? How can they ensure that paraeducators possess the knowledge and skills necessary to assist teachers with direct services to children? What can they do to build capacity for leadership in professional staff members to appropriately direct paraeducator's work?

Below are listed points for principals to consider:

1. Develop clearly delineated roles for paraeducators based on school goals and policies. You should be aware of any federal, district, and state policies and guidelines for hiring paraeducators. Most important, all staff—administrators, teachers, and paraeducators—need to be aware of the guidelines so that paraeducators are not assigned to tasks for which they are unqualified, untrained, or inadequately supervised (Ashbaker & Morgan, 1999). Clearly differentiating between the role of teacher and paraeducator is important because they differ significantly, even though paraeducators and teachers often work side-by-side, appearing to perform similar tasks (Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993). A guiding principle is this: Teachers provide leadership and clarify roles for paraeducators; paraeducators assist teachers in meeting their instructional goals. Various factors may affect the responsibilities assigned to paraeducators, such as their level of expertise in content areas and instruction. It is the administrator's job to clarify these roles.

2. Develop job descriptions that clearly outline needed qualifications and expected responsibilities. Written job descriptions "help promote job satisfaction by eliminating apprehensions about what is expected" (Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993). Job descriptions should be specific enough to provide necessary guidelines for responsibilities and evaluation of performance, and allow for adjustments to be made for paraeducators' varying levels of expertise, individual working styles, and student needs.

Ask for teacher input in developing the job description. Invite the potential supervisor to paraeducator interviews. This will help minimize possible conflicts between the teacher and paraeducator and will help clarify for both the paraeducator's responsibilities (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1997).

3. Provide consistent, competency-based training opportunities for paraeducators that provide a "continuum of experience." New Title I legislation requires that paraeducators be well trained and prepared for their role in assisting with instruction. State legislators are working on how to help districts meet these competency requirements. As this process evolves, one thing is clear—training and support for paraeducators have traditionally not been supported, both fundamentally and financially in many schools and districts. Just as teachers and administrators need sustained professional development, so do paraeducators. Professional development and training should be "long-range, comprehensive and systematic" (Pickett et al., p. 26). One-shot training sessions are generally less effective than a continuum of experiences: formal orientation to lay a foundation, inservice sessions for enhancing skill development, on-the-job training, and opportunities for career enhance-

ment such as academic credit or teacher preparation programs.

- New paraeducator orientations should not end after a formal induction. Orient the paraeducator by introducing him or her to all staff members. Assign mentors to new paraeducators, such as an experienced paraeducator. Provide time for paraeducators to become familiar with their responsibilities by having them observe other paraeducators or teachers.

- Make district and other training opportunities available that match the specific job responsibilities, such as training in a new reading curriculum. Often, scheduling time for paraeducators to attend inservice training is difficult; if at all possible, schedule training so that paraeducators can attend on paid time. If a district doesn't offer specific training sessions, investigate those offered by national associations at conferences (such as the International Reading Association), colleges and universities, or technical assistance centers. Encourage teachers and paraeducators to attend the same sessions, or at least receive the same information that will provide better coordination of curriculum delivery.

4. Provide training for teachers who are directing the work of paraeducators. Too often teachers are given the responsibility for directing the work of a paraeducator without any prior training in how to be a supervisor. They need training in time management, goal setting and feedback techniques, effective communication and collaboration, planning and delegation, role clarification, professionalism and ethics, problem solving, and providing feedback and evaluation of

paraeducators. Find out which community colleges and universities and technical assistance centers might provide this training. (See Resources section for some of those centers.)

5. Support the teacher-paraeducator team. Probably the most important thing a principal can do to encourage a successful team relationship between teachers and paraeducators is to build time into the schedule for them to plan, communicate, discuss student needs and progress, and receive feedback. It is not reasonable to expect teachers and paraeducators to meet outside scheduled work hours. While it may be difficult to schedule time, even scheduling a half hour on a regular basis will increase the team's efficiency and ensure necessary communication. If a teacher is expected to direct the work of the paraeducator, this time is essential to ensure coordination of teacher expectations and paraeducator responsibilities.

Other ways to support the team:

- Meet with teachers to make sure they understand their role in directing paraeducators' work and ensure that paraeducators understand who is responsible for supervising their work
- Include paraeducators in staff meetings and encourage their input on school improvement, needs assessment, and site-based teams
- Provide mailboxes and e-mail addresses to paraeducators so that they have a way to communicate with other staff members
- Include paraeducators in parent-teacher conferences if appropriate
- "Emphasize cooperation not competition" (Gerlach, 2001, p. 57)

- Make sure teachers and paraeducators have the necessary skills for effective teamwork

6. Develop an evaluative process for paraeducators and supervisors. Evaluating paraeducator performance is the job of the administrator, especially for more formal evaluations, and also of the immediate supervising teacher or certified specialist who is responsible for ongoing formal and informal evaluations. Characteristics of effective evaluations include frequent performance observations; specific competencies and performance standards to help paraeducators work on specific skills; honest, straightforward, and tactful statements; and consistent evaluation standards for all professional team members (French, 1997).

As mentioned previously, new Title I requirements state that one option for ensuring paraeducators are qualified, is for instructional paraeducators to pass a state or local assessment designed to demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist in reading, writing, and math instruction or readiness. Currently, state task forces such as in Washington are developing standards and policies for choosing and designing appropriate assessments.

The National Center for Paraprofessionals in Education has developed specific performance indicators of skill mastery for teachers and paraeducators as well as the different experience levels of paraeducator positions. These can be used as guidelines for school districts to develop their own performance guidelines after they have developed skill standards for various positions. For example, a Level 3 paraeducator whose responsibility is to assist teachers with assessing learner needs, should demonstrate the ability to use informal

assessment instruments developed by the teachers, administer standardized tests, and assist teachers in maintaining learning records.

The administrator should also evaluate the supervision of paraeducators. A checklist can be developed listing necessary components that answer four questions:

- Are district/school policies in place that provide guidelines for informal/formal assessment?
- Does the supervisor provide necessary support for adequate supervision (e.g., regular observation and feedback, lesson plans that list expectations)?
- Does the supervisor provide appropriate support for the paraeducator (e.g., clear communication of expectations, appropriate job coaching, respect)?
- Are objectives achieved for student outcomes (Vasa and Steckelberg, 1997)?

NORTHWEST SAMPLER

Now that we have outlined some ideas for making paraeducators successful members of the instructional team, let's look at what three schools and one school district in the Northwest are doing. Each of these schools employs paraeducators for different purposes. Some have reported success with increasing student achievement using paraeducators to tutor children in reading, or have found paraeducators beneficial in providing a connection for students and families to the school. The schools illustrate the common keys to success discussed in this booklet: administrative support and leadership; teacher direction of paraeducator work; respect for the unique role of paraeducators as part of a collaborative team, and the importance of paraeducator training, standards, and professional development. These are just a few of the many schools in the region and across the country implementing these keys to success. We provide contact information so schools can get in touch with each other to share ideas and learn from each other.

Location

Houghtaling Elementary School
2940 Baranof Road
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Contact

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Paraeducators Provide Group Instruction in Reading and Writing at Houghtaling

At 9:05 Katy Hook, Title I instructional tutor at Houghtaling Elementary School, pops into a first-grade classroom and lets three children know it is time to come with her to her classroom. Mrs. Hook asks each child, "Did you read your book to someone at home last night?" If one child hasn't, Hook has the child read to her as they walk.

Once inside the classroom, the children take their seats excitedly at the semicircular table with Mrs. Hook in the center. She asks the children if they would rather "do their writing job" first or phoneme skill cards first. "Writing job," the children say. Mrs. Hook pulls out each child's writing folder. She explains to a new child in the group that "when we want privacy while we write, we prop our folders up so others can't see and call it 'our office'." Mrs. Hook pulls out a book, reads the story once, and then instructs them to write each word as she speaks it. With longer words, she says, "Write the sounds that you hear."

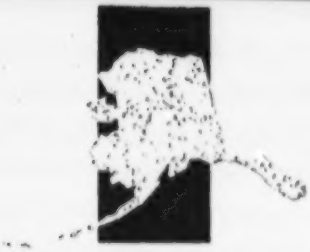
Following the writing job, Mrs. Hook pulls out phoneme flash cards and the children quickly sound them out. For the last few minutes of this 30-minute period, the children select a book to take home and read aloud to someone at home for the next day. Mrs. Hook and her students have created a game board in which students advance a step as they read a book.

Katy Hook has been a paraeducator at Houghtaling, one of five elementary schools in the Ketchikan Borough School District, for about 15 years. Of the 419 students, 156 are Alaska Native, and 133 (or 32 percent) are on the free and reduced-price lunch program.

At Houghtaling, paraeducators who are hired under Title I funds provide group instruction with teacher direction in reading and writing for students who have scored below the 35th percentile on the Gates standardized test. Currently there are two Title I tutors, one Indian Education tutor, and one ESL tutor. Paraeducators also work in the school media center and with special needs students.

Each tutor meets with a group of three to four children by grade level for 30 minutes a day, four days a week. Tutors also work with kindergarten students for 30 minutes to an hour each day. The tutors use Fridays for planning time (this time is paid), as well as time for working with individual children and assessing new students.

In the fall, the tutors and teachers meet to discuss the reading scores of students who have not met the required percentile. The teacher and tutor work together to coordinate instructional groups, both times and goals. With the tutor's input, the teacher makes the decision regarding what



instructional methodology, such as guided reading, phonemic awareness, or vocabulary, would be best for the group. All the tutors have been extensively trained in a program that integrates spelling, writing, and comprehension skills with the classroom reading curriculum. Each quarter the tutors use skill tests, which they have been trained to administer, to assess their students' progress. They then meet with the teacher to discuss the results.

On the day we visited the school, Hook was performing reading assessments for each student in her instructional group. During a typical session, Hook concentrates for the first 10–15 minutes on phonogram review and dictation (based on a districtwide reading program), and then moves into a guided reading format during which she reads a story, and has the children read the story while she cues for reading strategies. She concludes the session with children responding to the story in their journals.

All the paraeducators are full-time staff members, paid for a seven-hour work day (as are the teachers). The paraeducators and teachers are in the same union, although the paraeducators' contract is bargained separately from the teachers'. Paraeducators also bargained to receive the same health and professional development benefits as teachers.

The principal evaluates the tutors as he does all his staff. Each year he observes the tutors four different times for 30 minutes each. He also conducts two half-day formal observations per year. Teachers are on the same evaluation schedule.

Structured planning time for teachers and tutors is available twice a month before the start of classes. When teachers and tutors aren't able to meet, they meet at other times whenever

either one sees the need. For example, if the teacher or the paraeducator has concerns about a student's progress, they will meet to discuss strategies. Tutors receive a copy of the teacher's lesson plan for the week and use it to guide their tutoring sessions. Additionally, tutors have a copy of the teacher's reading instruction manual so they can follow the same curriculum as the teacher. In this way, the tutoring sessions complement the regular instruction.

First grade teacher Mark O'Brien makes it a point to communicate frequently with the tutors who work with his students. Each week he creates lesson plans for the tutors that include the vocabulary words and phonograms that he uses with the students. O'Brien, who has taught at Houghtaling for nine years, sees the work the tutors do with the students as an added reinforcement of the skills he teaches in his class. Although he is ultimately responsible for creating the lessons, he asks the tutors for their input on adjusting lessons to meet the needs of the individual students.

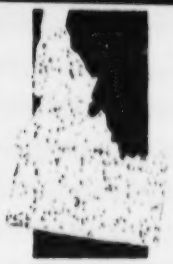
"I can see the impact [tutors have on the reading skills]," comments O'Brien. "Many children oftentimes need the extra time spent on these skills to reach grade level," he says. Time with tutors gives them more of that opportunity in a small-group setting and gives them more individualized support.

The tutors are included in staff meetings and offered paid staff development opportunities for training throughout the year. This past year, Hook was invited to attend the International Reading Association with nine other district staff members. During her 15-year tenure at the school she has been able to take advantage of district curriculum training sessions to provide her with more skills in tutoring students. Hook's job has

evolved considerably from when she started. When first hired, she worked with special needs children in a special education classroom. At that time, aides, as they were called, were only employed in special education or as building aides, performing duties such as correcting papers, supervising playground activity, and designing bulletin boards. Says Hook, "As Alaska's oil money dwindled and schools were forced to cut corners, building aides were cut and certified positions were replaced with aides." As accountability for student achievement has grown, paraeducators have been employed to assist with student learning goals. For the past 10 years, Hook has worked as a Title I small-group instructional tutor.

Because of her extensive experience at the school, Hook is the informal mentor to new tutors. When tutors Paula Varnell and Debby Hoyt first started, Hook spent at least one week with each—helping them find resources, introducing them to the staff, and reviewing curriculum strategies. Hook has an open-door policy for the other tutors and they feel free to come to her for questions.

Hook is forthright in discussing drawbacks to paraeducator employment, such as high turnover due mainly to the low pay scale (which is true in many schools). However, Hook would not still be assisting in instruction at Houghtaling after 15 years if she didn't obtain immense satisfaction from her work. What she sees that really makes a difference is her ability to provide extra support to those children who are struggling. "What I can guarantee is that the personal attention these children receive is important." As for her relationship with teachers, Hook says she feels teachers and administrators truly value what she has to offer and view her and the other tutors as integral members of the instructional team.



Location

Oakwood Elementary School (Grades 3-5)
252 S. 4th E.
Preston, ID 82363

Contact

Reid Carlson, Principal
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Paraeducators Provide Instructional Services and Much More at Oakwood

Oakwood Elementary School is located in Preston, Idaho, a small, rural community near the Utah border. Although it serves a rural population, Oakwood is the only school in the Preston School District that serves grades 3-5, resulting in an enrollment consistently more than 500. The district also includes one high school, a small alternative high school, one junior high, and one K-2 school, Pioneer Elementary, which is located directly next to Oakwood. Because of the consolidated nature of the district, it makes sense for most policies and programs to be districtwide, with many shared characteristics from school to school. Although our focus here is on Oakwood, we also spoke with paraeducators from Pioneer Elementary, and with Dr. Jerry Waddoups, the Curriculum Director for the district. It's clear that the two elementary schools, as well as the entire district, share a common set of goals, a common language, and a unified approach that mirrors the close-knit quality of their community.

At Oakwood, paraeducators are an essential part of the instructional team. Every classroom has a paraeducator for at least part of the day, working primarily one-to-one or in small groups, with a focus on reading, writing, and basic math skills. Paraeducators are also used extensively in special education, in the library, and to staff the resource room. They have been invaluable in the implementation of the school's multifaceted approach to reading instruction, which involves guided reading, Reading Renaissance programs including frequent, individualized STAR Reading assessments, as well as SRA/McGraw-Hill programs.

Paraeducators are viewed as an essential part of the school's professional staff. They are included in many professional development opportunities, including an annual Paraeducator Training Conference in Utah, and a recent two-day training program in a corrective reading program. One day a month is given to preparation, which often involves inservice training on issues such as behavioral management, or specific curriculum programs. Early-out Fridays provide teachers and paraeducators with ample planning time.

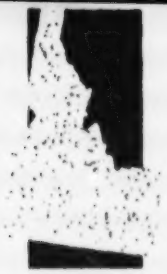
The hiring process at Oakwood reflects their view of paraeducators as qualified professionals. "We use about the same process to hire paraeducators as we do teachers," says Dr. Waddoups. "That includes two different interviews, and involves the principal, the superintendent, and a teacher. We're very proud of the quality of our paraeducators."

While paraeducators have always had an important place at Oakwood, many of them credit the district's former special education director, Dave Forbush, with increasing the focus on professionalism. "He was our advocate," says

Sharon Durant, who has been a paraeducator at Oakwood for 20 years. "He increased our training and professional development the last couple of years, which really helped. And he gave us more of a voice within the district." Several other paraeducators we spoke with also mentioned Forbush's tenure at the school as a turning point. Forbush was able to not only increase professional standards for paraeducators, but also to increase the district's attention to their rights and professional development opportunities. The awareness of the important role paraeducators play is now even more firmly entrenched at both the school and district levels.

One unique factor at Oakwood is its proximity to Utah State University, just across the state line in Logan, Utah. "Eighty percent of our teachers are Utah State graduates," says principal Reid Carlson. "They do an outstanding job training teachers, especially special education teachers." The close ties to Utah State have resulted in several professional development opportunities, including a class on improving the working relationship between teachers and paraeducators. "That really helped focus our observations on each other," says Sherrie Moser, another long-term paraeducator, "It really did help the relationships."

While Utah State provides the district with many well-trained beginning teachers, it also results in a slightly higher turnover rate. "A lot of the people we hire are first-time teachers, right out of Utah State," says Waddoups. "Many of them are starting their professional careers, starting families—there are a lot of factors involved." The result, he points out, is that "a lot of our paraeducators outlast our teachers."



The eight paraeducators we spoke with ranged in experience from first-year to more than 20 years, but the majority had been at the school for more than 10 years. This contrast between first-time teachers and long-term paraeducators could be the source for some interesting challenges, but it has rarely been a problem at Oakwood. "We know our role," says paraeducator Valyn Andersen. "You learn not to be pushy in those first few months," she adds. "You have to be very sensitive to individual teaching styles and let them make their own discoveries. Usually, they'll start to appreciate your experience right away, and draw on it, without feeling threatened." The roles are clear and the focus is on teamwork, agree the others with whom we spoke. Paraeducators are always working under the direction of certified teachers, but they are treated as equal members of the instructional team, with valuable experience and insights that are fully appreciated.

Another key to their success is peer mentoring. Long-term paraeducators often serve as mentors to both their fellow paraeducators and to inexperienced teachers who seek their advice. It is a smooth-running system that relies in equal parts on the wisdom and experience of long-term staff and on the clear, but flexible, policies developed by the district. There is an appreciation for the varying levels of paraeducator experience at Oakwood, which allows for a less rigid, more fluid delineation of roles not always possible at other schools. The impression one gets from a visit to Oakwood is of a highly professional, but family-type atmosphere, where every staff member is appreciated and all are focused on providing the best education possible to each student.

Location

Hardin Public Schools (PreK-12)
Route 1 Box 1001
Hardin, MT 59034-9707

Contact

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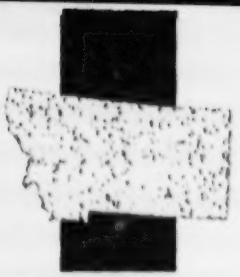
Paraeducators Play Multiple Roles in Instruction, Family Advocacy, and Indian Education at Hardin Public Schools

Hardin Public Schools consists of two districts that encompass a very large geographical area in southeastern Montana. District 1 consists of Hardin High School, and draws students from throughout the entire area, many of them busing in from more than an hour away. District 17-H consists of Hardin's primary (PreK-2), intermediate (3-5), and middle schools (6-8), but also includes the Fort Smith School (K-5), which is more than an hour away from Hardin, and the Crow Agency School (K-6), which is on the Crow Indian Reservation. Hardin itself is a small town just across the northern border of the reservation. The two districts together have an average enrollment of 1,700 students, of which about 56 percent are Native American, predominantly Crow, but also including some students from the neighboring Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Many of the students come from homes where the Crow language is



either predominant or of equal importance to English. Many also live in extremely rural areas, often without telephones. The challenges that face the districts can seem as immense as the beautiful, windswept prairie that surrounds it, but their successes mirror the strength and soul of the people.

One important factor in Hardin Public Schools' many successes is the role that paraeducators play, both in the classroom and in bridging the gap between the schools and the families they serve. The Parent Center for Hardin Public Schools consists of Parent Involvement Coordinator Janice Eckman, and two Family Advocates, Davene Big Lake and Ruth Harris. Federal Programs Director Beth Howe Hugs is in charge of all supervision, evaluations, and hiring for the center.

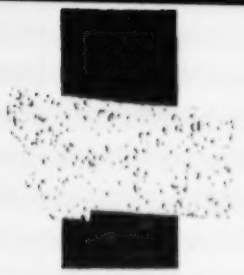
The approach that Hardin Public Schools takes to the use of paraeducators exhibits the key ingredients we have seen in all effective programs. As Beth Hugs says, "You won't see our paraeducators standing around the copier machine. They're in the classroom and out in the community." Besides the Parent Center, there are paraeducators in every classroom, in special education, in the library, in the high school's learning lab, and in the computer labs that are in every school. There are paraeducators staffing the after-school tutoring programs, and there are four paraeducators at the Crow Agency School who received full training from MSU-Billings in the teaching of Native American children and teaching to individual learning styles.

In addition, almost all paraeducators are full-time staff during the nine-month school year, and after two years are offered health care benefits, sick leave, paid holidays, and retirement plans. The districts will even go to great lengths

to offer summer employment to those paraeducators who request it, whether on the grounds crew or building maintenance or doing office work. Paraeducators are also included in many professional development opportunities, such as Montana Education Association training sessions and family literacy conferences. The districts are involved in a teacher training program with Little Bighorn College and MSU-Billings, which pays tuition, materials, and a small monthly stipend to Native Americans who wish to become certified teachers. Paraeducators are given first priority in the program. Graduates of the program are strongly encouraged, though not required, to seek employment with schools serving reservations. Hugs estimates that more than 100 Native American students in the program will be certified within the next five years.

The hiring of paraeducators is done building by building and often includes a current paraeducator in addition to a certified teacher and school administrator. At least one member of all screening and interview committees in the two districts must be of Native American heritage—one example of a cultural awareness that might seem obvious, but is by no means a given in similar schools around the country. Throughout the districts there is an intense focus on offering a culturally appropriate education, which includes the teaching of the Crow language at the middle and high schools. Tutors who speak Crow are also available at all grade levels, and the student advocates in each building are well versed in the culture.

All paraeducators work under the direct supervision of a certified teacher or an administrator. As Hugs says, "In the past, Title I used to be a dumping ground for burned-out



teachers, but that has changed. We have made every effort to provide the best teachers for those students with the greatest needs." All the teachers treat their paraeducators as co-teachers, she notes, but the roles are clearly delineated. "It's team-teaching in the best sense. Students often don't know the difference between a teacher and a paraeducator in the classroom, but the roles are clear." This teamwork is based on significant planning time between teachers and paraeducators, including grade-level meetings every Friday afternoon. "There are detailed job descriptions for paraeducators," says Hugs, "as well as policies and grievance procedures specifically for them."

In the Parent Center, all these policies and procedures are seen to great effect. The roles of each member are clearly defined and the teamwork is seamless. Every summer, Davene Big Lake (a Crow tribal member who speaks the language fluently) and Ruth Harris attempt to make home visits to every family with a child entering kindergarten. With an average of 130 kindergarten students each year, spread over three different schools, and with families many miles apart, it is a daunting goal, but one that the two family advocates take very seriously. "We want parents to feel welcome right from the beginning," says Big Lake. "It's really important to make that initial contact." These visits are also informative, giving parents an idea of the many resources available to them, including free books, materials dealing with phonemic awareness, and information from the Indian Health Center regarding dental care, nutrition, immunization, and parenting skills.

These home visits are only the beginning. Throughout the school year the parent involvement program offers a variety

of events and resources. There are Family Fun Nights once a month, as well as Family Game Nights, Bingo for Books, a Christmas crafts program, Cooking with Kids, and many other activities. "It's been a great way to educate the community," says Eckman. "We've had some trial and error, like the time we had to make 350 ice cream sundaes, but these programs have been a great success."

The Parent Center itself offers a wide variety of resources. There are books and videos available for checkout, board games, computers with Internet access, and information on ADD/ADHD, parenting skills, approaches to discipline, dealing with homework, and reading with children, among other things. But the most important and effective resource is the staff. "We all feel so strongly that what we're doing is important," says Eckman. "Everything we do is focused on the goal of bridging the gap between the schools and the parents."

In the Hardin Public Schools, paraeducators play many different roles, but whether they are in the classroom or out in the community, they have the same professionalism and passion for their work as the best teachers. "I think in many ways we are less intimidating to parents than certified teachers or administrators," says Harris. "We're their advocates and we can give the school a human face."

"At the same time, we're advocates for our teachers," adds Eckman. "Every time we make contact with parents it's an opportunity to bridge that gap."

Location

Cherrydale Primary School (K–2)
1201 Galloway Street
Steilacoom, WA 98388

Contact

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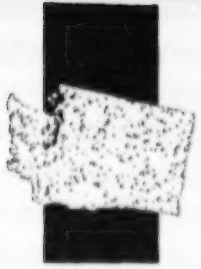
Paraeducators Provide Group Reading Instruction at Cherrydale Primary

Stopping in the small town of Steilacoom, just south of Tacoma, is a refreshing break from the traffic-snarled freeway that joins Seattle to Portland. No fast food restaurants, gas stations, or Starbucks are present here, but 35 structures—including the state's first library and courthouse—are more than a century old in the state's first incorporated town.

Cherrydale Primary School, located up the hill from the National Historic District, has been newly renovated to provide a child-welcoming environment for the 350 K–2 students. Reading instruction has also been recently reengineered so that students who need additional intensive instruction to meet standards receive it.

The "reading continuum" that provides these children group tutoring in addition to their regular classroom reading instruction has influenced the way paraeducators are



employed at Cherrydale. Prior to fall 2000, paraeducators were employed primarily as teacher assistants, with each one assigned to a teacher. Depending on the teacher, each assistant would have different responsibilities. They were not necessarily trained in the curriculum, and their work was not coordinated by anyone except the individual teacher.

During the one and one-half-hour reading block, paraeducators provide small-group instruction to Title I students in the class for 25 minutes. Five Title I and special education paraeducators work under the direction and supervision of the Title I specialist, Shawn Munsey, and the special education specialist, Danita Ross. Munsey and Ross direct the work of their respective paraeducators and meet together weekly to coordinate lesson plans.

The reading curriculum that paraeducators use emphasizes phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Students who need extra assistance also receive an additional 25 minutes of small-group instruction during their regular class time, for a total of two hours of block reading instruction.

Director of Pupil Services Penny Jackson, Munsey, and Ross all consider the paraeducators highly valuable members of the instructional team, now that the paraeducators are working with students toward specific educational goals. The keys to their effectiveness have been:

- *Specific qualifications, criteria, and training for Cherrydale's paraeducators.* They are required to meet Washington state's 14 Core Competencies for Paraeducators. The competencies describe the awareness, knowl-

edge, understanding, and abilities that paraeducators must demonstrate in order to work with students with disabilities. (See www.paraeducator.com/html/ competencies.htm for a full list). They include ability to communicate with colleagues, follow instructions, and use problem-solving skills to work as an effective team member. Paraeducators can receive training that is scheduled during inservice days through Puget Sound ESD and the district. Upon successful completion of the training program, participants receive a certificate of completion. Paraeducators have also been extensively trained in the school's reading curriculum, including at least two full days of initial training plus ongoing training.

- *Excellent communication between teachers and paraeducators.* Every Friday the paraeducators meet with the Title I and special education teachers to plan. All paraeducators have a folder for each child with whom they work that includes a lesson plan for the week and assessments. The teachers and paraeducators go over the students' progress during their meetings, discussing what is and what isn't working. Although there is no formal time allotted for the classroom teachers and paraeducators to meet, they get together informally when necessary. The classroom teachers also have access to the paraeducators' folders for each child. Says Munsey, Title I specialist, "Teachers talk with paraeducators constantly about their students."

- *Administration, board member, and school staff support.* Munsey states that she values the paraeducators as fellow educators. She notes that initially the change from classroom assistants to instructional aides was "disconcerting" for some teachers. However, as the teachers began to see

dramatic improvement in their students who are tutored, they became supportive of the paraeducator's role. The paraeducators also see how their contributions contribute to measurable improvement in their students' reading ability. "It is a more rewarding role for them," says Munsey. "The district has more paraeducators than most other districts in Washington because administrators here see the benefits that these well-trained staff members bring to the reading instruction," say both Munsey and Ross.

- *Specific guidelines for the roles of paraeducators.* Cherrydale's paraeducators provide intensive reinforcement of reading skills under the direction and supervision of the Title I teachers. Classroom teachers also direct the work of the paraeducators. In one classroom, three groups are broken out into separate tables, a teacher working with a general education group, and two Title I paraeducators each working with a group. Other teachers prefer to have the paraeducators working in the hall outside the classroom for the 25 allotted minutes.

Jackson and the specialist teachers all see the great progress children are making with the benefit of well-trained paraeducators, directed by the teacher specialists. In Title I, the first-grade students advanced from the 28th percentile in fall 2000 to the 67th percentile in spring 2001. Second-grade students increased as well. One student moved from the 4th percentile to the 67th percentile in one year! Says Munsey, "I see these kids reading with greater fluency than before they started working with the paraeducators." As a matter of fact, both first and second grade doubled their fluency rates in one year.

CONCLUSION

As we can see from the Northwest Sampler profiles, paraeducators can offer tremendous benefits for children. They provide instructional reinforcement that enhances every student's opportunity to learn, meet standards, and achieve academic success. They are a vital link between the school and the community. It is well worth the effort to provide them with the best training and support possible. As Pickett and Gerlach emphasize:

"It is important that the contributions paraeducators ... make to improving the quality and productivity of education and related services not be overlooked; and that standards for their employment, roles, supervision, and preparation be established and opportunities for staff development and professional growth be institutionalized" (1997, p. 266).

We hope that this booklet provides some suggestions for making paraeducators productive and beneficial members of the instructional team. We urge you to consult the Resources and References sections for additional information.

APPENDIX: EXISTING OR PROPOSED STATE PARAEDUCATOR CERTIFICATION POLICIES

Alabama. Letter of approval required. Thirty hours of formal training; permanent.

Delaware. Permit with requirements not specified; must have evaluated experience and training and skills relevant to the position; permanent.

Florida. Legislation outlining career ladder with LEA option (not mandatory) passed in 1998. Current regulations specify standards and procedures that apply to teacher aides, including health, age, knowledge of policies, and instructional practices.

Georgia. State license requires two years of college or 50 hours; renewable every three years, requiring additional 50 hours instruction or inservice.

Idaho. Special education – state standards for knowledge and performance. Recommendations for orientation and training in first year of employment.

Illinois. State certificate requires completion of a teacher aide training program approved by the superintendent or 30 semester hours; permanent. Legislation pending for revision and creation of task force to study issue.

Indiana. Special education—appropriately trained paraprofessionals may work under the direction of a teacher or related services personnel. Public agencies must provide preservice and inservice training.

Iowa. New hires must complete inservice in first year of employment. LEAs must have staff development plan that includes paraeducators. Special education—preser-

vice and inservice requirements. Certificate granted to those who complete a recognized paraeducator preparation program with 90 clock hours of training.

Kansas. The state requires a permit for special education only. Effective May 2000, state regulations are no longer in effect, but districts must follow these standards in order to receive state reimbursement of approximately$8,000 per special education paraprofessional. Level 1—Twenty hours, renewable every year. Level 2—Thirty semester hours plus 450 hours inservice plus two years' experience at Level 1; renew every three years. Level 3—Sixty semester hours or AA degree plus 900 hours inservice plus three years at Level 2; renew every three years.

Maine. Education technician/Level I—high school diploma, orientation, ongoing inservice. Education technician/Level II—Two years college plus inservice. Education technician/Level III—three years college plus inservice. All are renewed yearly.

Maryland. State task force report recommending licensure standards presented to state legislature in 1998; no LEA mandate. 2001—Development of state regulations in progress.

Minnesota. Minnesota Omnibus Education Bill of 1998 requires school boards in districts where paraprofessionals are employed in programs for students with disabilities to ensure that: Paraprofessionals have sufficient knowledge and skills in various areas, annual training opportunities to further develop knowledge and skills, and ongoing direction of their work by a licensed teacher, and where appropriate and possible, the supervision of a school nurse.

Mississippi. Assistant teacher; complete the reading, language arts, and math portions of a current nationally normed eighth grade standardized achievement test (exempt if holding a

teaching certificate). HS diploma or GED; participate in annual training provided by the district.

Missouri. State requirement for instructional aides only of 60 hours college; renewed yearly.

New Hampshire. State Certificate. HS diploma, one year experience; complete a two-week orientation session on special education. Certified paraprofessionals must complete 50 hours in areas determined by the professional development master plan for their district.

New Jersey. Paraprofessional positions are approved by the county superintendent of schools who must develop job descriptions and standards for appointment.

New Mexico. State requirement that paraprofessional must complete a training program designed by local school district. Training varies according to district and how they use paraprofessionals.

New York. State certified. *Teacher aide*: must fulfill civil service requirements; responsibilities are non-teaching. *Teaching assistant—temporary license*: HS diploma; responsibilities are instructional in nature. *Teaching assistant—continuing certificate*: six hours of collegiate study; one year of experience; responsibilities are instructional in nature. *Teaching assistant—Level I*: HS diploma; satisfactory level of performance on the New York State Teacher Certification Examination Test. *Teaching assistant—Level II*: all requirements of Level I plus six hours of collegiate study. *Teaching assistant-Level III*: all requirements of Level II plus 18 hours of collegiate study. *Teaching assistant— paraprofessional certificate*: all requirements of Level III plus must be matriculated in a program registered as leading to teacher certification.

Ohio. State permit. Education aide needs skills

sufficient to do the job, one-year permit. Education Assistant—high school diploma and participation in unspecified inservice training under a one-year permit; renewed every four years.

Oklahoma. Legislation passed 1999; in process at state department of education.

Oregon. Under discussion at state department of education

Pennsylvania. State certified (private schools only).

Rhode Island. State requirement. High school diploma; training at discretion of district (Rhode Island Federation of Teachers is working to revise).

South Carolina. HS diploma; participation in preservice and inservice training programs for aides.

Texas. State certified. Education Aide—high school diploma and experience working with children; Education Aide II—Fifteen hours college or demonstrated proficiency; Education Aide III—Thirty hours college and three years as Aide I or II. Legislation introduced for revision, 1999.

Utah. Standards for special education paraeducators were developed and approved by state board in May 1995. Collaboration with the state office of education, school districts, and two- and four-year institutes created two-year associate degree programs for paraeducator development that is articulated to four-year special education and elementary education teacher preparation programs.

Vermont. Level I—Six hours college, renewed yearly. Level II—Thirty hours college plus one year experience, renewed every two years. Level III—Sixty hours college plus two years' experience, renewed every three years. Level IV—Ninety hours college, renew every four years. Personnel standards for paraprofessionals

will be included in special education rules in 2002.
Washington. Current system defined but not mandatory.
Wisconsin. Special education only. Three years college or three years supervising youth activities or some combination that can include two years at voc-tech school specializing in childcare, renewed every five years.

Source: Adapted from a table on the American Federation of Teachers Web site www.aft.org/psrp/certification/status.html, retrieved 1/10/02 with additional updates provided by paraeducator experts.

RESOURCES

NWREL staff members will gladly answer requests for basic information, provide references, and suggest referrals to available resources. Please call Karen Schmidt or Carlos Sundermann at 1-800-547-6339

American Federation of Teachers Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel Web site www.aft.org/psrp/

Minnesota Paraprofessional Consortium
University of Minnesota
111 Pattee Hall; 150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-624-9893
Web site: http://ici2.coled.umn.edu/para/default.html

Montana Paraeducator Development Project
Montana State University at Billings
Web site: www.msubillings.edu/mtcd/paraed/

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322-6526
435-797-7272
Web site: www.nrcpara.org
Contact: Marilyn Likins, Co-Director or Teri Wallace, Co-Director
E-mail: marilyn@nrcpara.org or walla001@umn.edu

The PAR²A Center
University of Colorado at Denver
Contact: Dr. Nancy French, Director
Web site: http://paracenter.cudenver.edu/

The Center provides the Paraeducator Supervision Academy, comprehensive curriculum packages for paraeducators serving English Language Learners, students with low-incidence disabilities, and many more professional development opportunities.

Washington Education Association
Paraeducator Issues Web Site
www.wa.nea.org/PRF_DV/PARA_ED/PARA.HTM

www.paraeducator.com
A resource for paraeducators in Washington state. Includes training modules in the core competencies for paraeducators, online discussion groups, and fact sheets concerning new Title I requirements.

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